

ANECDOTA

No.



5

SCOWAH



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To my
Friend

My

Dear Sir

Flower



Engraved portrait of Poggio from Poggiana, Amsterdam, 1720

ANECDOTA SCOWAH NUMBER FIVE

THE *FACETIÆ* OF
POGGIO
THE FLORENTINE

By ALBERT RAPP

PRÆFATIO & BIBLIOGRAPHY

By Nat Schmulowitz



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ANECDOTA SCOWAH Number One: *Epitaphia and Precursory Apologia with an Apologue* by Nat Schmulowitz.

ANECDOTA SCOWAH Number Two: *The Legend of Joe Miller* by Evan Esar with a Prefatory Fragment by Nat Schmulowitz.

ANECDOTA SCOWAH Number Three: *The Ancient Greeks and Joe Miller* by Albert Rapp and a Prolegomenon by Nat Schmulowitz.

ANECDOTA SCOWAH Number Four: *The Joe Miller of the Near East (Nasreddin Hoja)* by Albert Rapp and an Onsoz and Bibliography by Nat Schmulowitz.

Præfatio



POGGIO'S *facetie* are an interesting contribution to the gelotica of his period. In addition, for one who served the church as an Apostolic Secretary for upwards of fifty years under eight Popes (one of whom was a former Pope John XXIII, 1410-1415), to have the boldness and determination which the *facetie* reflect, presents an unusual personality. According to Homer, the immortal gods had occasional opportunity for indulging in merriment. Why, therefore, could not apostolic secretaries and officers of the Roman Chancery indulge in merry tale telling?

In the conclusion to his anthology Poggio identifies the secluded room in the Vatican in which the *facetie* were born as "our *bugiale*, a sort of laboratory for fibs." There Poggio and his coterie of tall tale tellers exchanged the news of the day, "conversed on various subjects, mostly with a view to relaxation, but sometimes also with serious intent." Poggio assures his readers that "nobody was spared and whatever met with our disapprobation was freely censured; oftentimes the Pope himself was the first subject matter of our criticism." He credits some of the tales to others, Razello of Bologna, Antonio Lusco, "a most witty man," the Roman Cincio "who was very fond of a joke," and then he modestly observed that "I have also added some good things of my own."

These *bugiale* meetings are reminiscent of the famous "Sixty Club" at Athens, in the time of Demosthenes, at whose meetings jokes and witty sayings were exchanged.

The *facetie* undoubtedly disclose the qualities and character of some of the clergy and the status and deportment of some of the people with whom Poggio and his friends had contact. They represent, as most jokes do, "the small change of history." Some of the *facetie* are merciless in their satirical attacks upon those members of the clergy who were overblown, affected, pretentious, ignorant, bombastical, hypocritical, vain, false in humility,

Præfatio

conceited, or immoral. Most of the jests cast an interesting and significant light on the manner of the times. Some of the jests were no doubt created and circulated as a palliative to the pathos of the lives of many in the Roman community.

Poggio was disturbed, disenchanted and shocked by the conditions which prevailed around him. He observed personally and directly growing agnosticism, disrespect for authority, religious and moral, the lewd and licentious conduct of both men and women in and out of the clerical order. He chose satire in the form of wit, ridicule and mockery to expose and perhaps correct these conditions.

In view of Poggio's extended employment, occupation and environment, his *facetie* virtually evidenced his capacity to laugh at himself and to look at the then current church organization with which he was so long identified (and himself and his associates) objectively. He who can laugh at himself discloses commendable personality stature.

Edward Storer in his *Facetie of Poggio* (1928), sums up the essence of the *facetie* thus:

"All wives are assumed to be unfaithful, and most husbands are either rakes or cuckolds, or both, in Poggio's pages. The confessional is a trap for women's virtue or a convenient resource of the licentious cleric. Convents and monasteries are, as a rule, little better than lupanars. For religion, no respect is shown in the *facetie*, and Poggio makes fun of the holy rites and sacraments. When the friars and priests are not immoral rascals, they are *sciocchi*, or fools, like the parish priest who did not know when Easter fell. Or else they are knaves, like the friar of St. Anthony who promised protection to a shepherd's flocks in return for a gift of money, and promised of course without result."

The Catholic Encyclopedia describes the *facetie* briefly as "a collection of witty sayings, anecdotes, *quidproquos* and insolence, mingled with obscenities and impertinent jesting with religious subjects."

There seems to be a curious biographical similarity between Poggio and John Abul-Faraj, more commonly known as Bar Hebraeus, the head of the Jacobite Church and the Maphrian of the East from 1264 to 1268. Both men were identified with church organizations. Both were prolific writers on profound scholarly subjects. Late in life both authored an anthology of jests, Poggio—his *Facetie*, Bar Hebraeus—his *Book of Laughable Stories*. Both included vulgarisms and coarse anecdotes in their respective anthologies. Each wrote an introduction and a conclusion in the nature of an explanation and an apology.

Præfatio

Poggio declared, "Let not critics carp at this jest book on account of its free and easy strain. There will be many, I presume, inclined to find fault with these tales of ours either as being frivolous and unworthy of a serious man or because they miss a more ornate and elevated style in the recital thereof. . . . I wish to be read by men of wit and jolly companions. . . . Should my readers happen to be too rustic I leave them at liberty to think what they please."

In a similar strain Bar Hebraeus declared in his introduction, "Let this book be a consolation to those who are sad . . . and a wonderful companion to those who love amusement, for no matter worthy of being recorded is omitted therefrom. . . . Let each man choose what is best for himself and let each pluck the flowers which please him."

In his concluding "Apologia," Bar Hebraeus, realizing that a certain number of his stories are coarse and refer to matters which some may regard "beyond the pale of the path of chastity," justifies their inclusion by asserting that, "As in the tabernacle of wisdom every kind of thing is necessary, nothing whatsoever that in a natural way sharpeneth the intelligence and enlighteneth the understanding and comforteth and rejoiceth the mind which is sorrowful and suffering should ever be rejected. . . . Thou wilt not find in this book a single petty or contemptible story or one which is absolutely destitute of some intellectual profit." Nevertheless, when E. A. Wallis Budge (Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities in the British Museum) translated the *Laughable Stories* into English he relegated the coarse ones to the "respectable obscurity of the Latin tongue."

Poggio's *facetiae* did more to make him known than all the literary works he wrote, for he attained a popularity which is indicated by the lengthy though incomplete bibliography published herein (*post*), while the *Laughable Stories* of Bar Hebraeus remained relatively unknown. Perhaps some future ANECDOTA SCOWAH will be devoted to Bar Hebraeus.

Poggio became a target for many critics, including Gesner, the Abbott Tritheme, Erasmus, and the Council of Trent, which put his *facetiae* on the *Index Expurgatorius*.

Poggio's statement in his introduction, that the *bugiale* fellowship "exchanged the news of the day" may well have been the forerunner to the anonymous news bulletins about the Papal family which for centuries were placed upon the Pasquino statue which still stands at the corner of Piazza Navona opposite the former palace of Cardinal Caraffa in Rome.

According to Rev. Wm. Shepherd in his *Life of Poggio*, the year 1450 (being the celebration of the Jubilee), "a prodigious concourse of people"

Prefatio

were attracted to Rome. During this interval Poggio assembled his *facetie* and caused them to be published either that year or the next succeeding year. Aside from the dullness of many of the *facetie*, Shepherd declares:

“It is a striking proof of the licentiousness of the times, that an apostolic secretary, who enjoyed the friendship and esteem of the pontiff, should have published a number of stories which outrage the laws of decency, and put modesty to the blush; and that the dignitaries of the Roman hierarchy should have tolerated a book, various passages of which tend not merely to expose the ignorance and hypocrisy of individuals of the clerical profession, but to throw ridicule on the most sacred ceremonies of the Catholic church. Recanati indeed endeavours to defend the fame of Poggio, by suggesting the idea, that many of the most licentious stories were added to his collection by posterior writers; and he supports this opinion by asserting that he has seen two manuscript copies of the *Facetie*, in which many of the obnoxious passages in question are not to be found. The validity of this defence is, however, rendered extremely questionable by the consideration of a fact, of which Recanati was probably ignorant, namely, that Lorenzo Valla, in the fourth book of his *Antidotus in Poggium*, which was published about the year 1452, not only impeaches the *Facetie* of blasphemy and indecency; but recites, by way of holding that work up to reprobation, the most scandalous stories which are now to be found in the whole collection.”

Shepherd concludes his biography of Poggio with a tribute from which the following are excerpts.

“It was with justice that the Florentines held the name of Poggio in respectful remembrance. Inspired by a zealous love of his country, he had constantly prided himself upon the honour of being a citizen of a free state, and he neglected no opportunity which presented itself of increasing and displaying the glory of the Tuscan republic. . . . His admission into the Roman chancery, and his continuance in offices of confidence under eight successive pontiffs, afford an ample proof not only of his ability in business, but also of his fidelity and integrity. Honoured by the favour of the great, he did not sacrifice his independence at the shrine of power, but uniformly maintained the ingenuous sentiments of freedom. . . . The licentiousness in which he occasionally indulged in the early part of his life, and the indecent levity which occurs in some of his writings, are rather the vices of the times than of the man. We accordingly find that those circumstances did not deprive him of the countenance of the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries—they did not cause him to forfeit the favour of the pious Eugenius, or of the virtuous and accomplished Nicolas v. His failings, indeed, were fully counterbalanced by several moral qualities of superior excellence.”

Præfatio

Even though the *Facetiæ* were put on the *Index Expurgatorius* by the Council of Trent, both Poggio as an individual in history and his *Facetiæ* as one of his literary creations, seem to be in good standing with the Church currently, for in 1959 there was published in Florence a book entitled *Poggio Bracciolini, Nella Luce Dei Suoi Tempi*, by P. Domenico Bacci, which carries the Imprimatur of the Archbishop and the Vicar General of Florence.

Furthermore, J. A. Symonds declares in his *Renaissance in Italy*, that notwithstanding the vulgarity of some of the *facetiæ*, and in spite of their reflection on some of the clergy, "not a word of censure from the Vatican can I find recorded."

So much for Poggio!

Again, ANECDOTA SCOWAH is indebted to Prof. Albert Rapp for his instructive and scholarly presentation on the *Facetiæ* of Poggio. This was made possible by a grant from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophic Society. That he was highly qualified to make the research is revealed by the end product which discloses his critical ability to discern and communicate the significance of the *facetiæ* in the transmission of the jest form in Europe and elsewhere.

NAT SCHMULOWITZ

March 29, 1962.



Statue of Poggio by Donatello in Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence

The Facetiæ of

POGGIO *the* FLORENTINE



ONE of the most significant works in the annals of world jokelore is a collection of jests entitled the *Facetiæ of Poggio the Florentine*, often referred to as the first joke book in the Modern Western World.

Poggio, or Poggio Bracciolini, was born not actually in Florence, but in Terranuova near Florence, on February 11th, 1380, in the exciting days of the Italian Renaissance. While very young he became an enthusiast for the new humanism which was to make Florence the center city of European culture and was later to spread to the entire continent. New vistas were opening in the arts, science, and in refined living. Western man was ready for a swing to gaiety, even to irreverent frivolity.

Poggio studied under two of the famous teachers of his day: Latin, under John of Ravenna; and Greek under Manuel Chrysoloras, the first to teach classical Greek in Western Europe in over 700 years.

In 1403, at the age of twenty-three, Poggio was chosen to be Apostolic Secretary to Pope Boniface IX. For fifty years he retained that office and it was here that he had the opportunity of gathering the tales which he published late in his lifetime.

From time to time he travelled in Switzerland, Germany, and France, where he searched the dusty attics of monasteries, bringing to light precious manuscripts of ancient authors. In San Gallen, in a dark dungeon, he ferreted out the complete works of Quintilian. He inveighed against the ignorance of the monks.

He unearthed seven orations of Cicero, twelve plays of Plautus, manuscripts of Lucretius and Petronius, and the *Germania* of Tacitus. Poggio's own writings are entirely in Latin. He was very proud of his Latin style.

Poggio was seventy, when, in 1451, he published his *Facetiæ*. It was an instantaneous success. It circulated quickly through Italy, France, Germany, England and Spain. It was read avidly by those who could handle the Latin tongue.

The *Facetiæ* of Poggio

We can readily picture what happened. These people translated and repeated the stories orally and added them to published editions of stories, anecdotes and fables. For the next two hundred years it would be almost impossible to compile a definitive bibliography of items in which at least a few of the Poggio stories were included, whether acknowledged or not.

Oddly enough, because no doubt of the coarseness of some of the stories, no complete translation of the entire *Facetiæ* appeared for well over two hundred years; not until 1878 when Isidore Liseux did a translation into French. In the next year the same Liseux did the first translation into English, which incidentally was published not in England but in Paris. The first complete translation into German did not appear until 1905, that of Semerau's; and the first complete translation into Italian not until 1924.

But long before this the Latin version had been an overnight best-seller; and wherever it went it had planted this new literary form, or a form based upon it; in France, the *Cents Nouvelles Nouvelles*; in Germany, the *Facetiæ* of Heinrich Bebel and others; in England the *Hundred Mery Talsy*, known to Shakespeare, and the *Mery Tales and Quicke Ansmeres*; in Spain, Juan de Timoneda's *El Sobremesa y Alivio de Caminantes*.

The form isn't completely new. It builds upon the Greek apophthegmata, the Arab stories of a Spanish Jew named Petrus Alphonsus, the tales of the Turkish Hojah Nasreddin, the French *fabliaux*, the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, and others. But it becomes distinctive, in Poggio's hands.

Perhaps one of the newest things about it was the idea of publishing a collection of humorous episodes, just for the fun of it. This was in the Renaissance spirit, and thoroughly pagan. This Poggio recognizes in his brief "Preface:"

"There will be many, I suppose, who will attack these stories of mine as being trivial and not worthy of a learned man; and they will attack the style as being popular and vulgar. To these I should like to reply that I have read that our ancestors, the wisest and the most learned of them, enjoyed witticisms, jokes and tales. They thought these deserved praise rather than censure. This I think is sufficient reply to them."

Then he adds: "If you don't like them, you are not required to read them," and the very fine line "*A facetis et humanis legi cupio*." ("I wish to be read by men of wit and understanding.")

What are the *facetiæ* like?

There are 273. They run in length from a short paragraph to about a page and a half. They are witty "come-backs" short novellas, or just humorous happenings.

The *Facetiæ* of Poggio

A dozen of them don't belong in the collection at all, and don't even pretend to be funny. Of these, eleven relate attested stories of miracles or prodigies and purport to be actual supernatural occurrences. A rain of blood in an area in France. What happened to two farmers who went out tying up grain on a Holy Day: they were frozen to their work. An invalid who lived without food or water for two years.

The twelfth is the story of a "bad seed," of a thirteen-year-old boy who lured two little children to a cave, killed them and ate their flesh. Poggio prefaces this one by saying: "Let me insert among these tales a most horrible and unspeakable occurrence." The 261 other stories are supposed to be funny. A large percentage of them are not very funny today. They are merely coarse.

As to the *facetia*-form: it is not like our joe-miller of today. It is less compact, more rambling, and often goes beyond the punch-line to add an explanation. The style of the *Hundred Mery Talys* in England is exactly the same; and so is the choice of subject matter. The influence here is direct and apparent.

The odd thing is that our present-day joke-form is more closely related to the Greek of the Philogelos, and that is probably the contribution of the famous *Joe Miller Jest Book*. In this the jest-form is that of the Philogelos and this form proceeded to drive out the *facetia*-form.

The two favorite themes in Poggio's *Facetiæ* are the lascivious and ignorant clergy and the wife outwitting her husband and lying with her lover. There is no example of a husband outwitting his wife; which is perhaps understandable.

There is a large number of moron stories, most of which have parallels in the Hojah Nasreddin cycle. I would judge that this is the source. They are told as though on actual living persons; but then, practically all Poggio's stories are. Even in the Hojah cycle, the moron stories are probably an intrusion; for the Hojah is characteristically clever and witty, and this group of stories treating him as a fool does not fit with the majority.

My assumption here is that this type came to Turkey via the Philogelos, the ancient Greek joke book, and particularly its stock character of the absent-minded professor, but also the stock character of the moron.

The *Facetiæ* of Poggio

☞ *We begin with some of Poggio's stories.*



HERE is a doctor in Milan, a stupid blockhead, who saw a man start out to trap birds with an owl and anxious to see how it was done, asked if he might go along. The hunter agreed and he stationed the man under cover of thick foliage close to the owl and cautioned him not to say a word, lest he frighten away the birds. When a large flock of birds had gathered, the blockhead called out: "Draw together the nets! There are lots of birds!" At the sound of his voice, the birds all took to their wings. The hunter reproached him bitterly and he promised to be silent.

The birds came back to the spot, whereupon the fool called out in Latin "*Aves permultæ sunt!*" He was certain that the birds wouldn't understand what he said in Latin. The birds fled again, and again the bird-catcher robbed of his catch, berated the man bitterly for having spoken.

The man said: "Do birds understand Latin?" The Doctor thought that the birds had fled, not at the sound of his voice, but from the meaning of the words, as if they had understood them. [No. 179.]

☞ *The last sentence is for those that don't get the point. The following story very clearly is traceable to the Hojab Nasreddin and its humor pattern goes back to the Greek Philogelos.*



HERE was in Florence a fool, Nigniacca by name, not quite completely out of his mind and very amusing. Some young men, as a joke, decided to persuade him that he was seriously ill and they worked out a plan. One of them met him one morning as he left his house and asked if there were anything wrong with him, he looked so pale and so different. "Nothing at all," said the fool.

A few steps further on, by pre-arrangement, a second met him and asked him if he felt feverish, for his face was thin and sickly. The fool began to have some doubts, for he did not suspect anything. He was walking along slowly now and worried, when a third plotter stared at him and said: "Your face shows that you have a violent fever and that you are seriously ill."

Nigniacca was thoroughly frightened. He stood stock still, and wondered whether he had a fever. A fourth jokester appeared, and told him he was gravely ill and wondered why he wasn't in bed and urged him to go home at once, saying he would accompany him and care for him like a brother.

So the fool went home, as being dangerously ill, and got into bed, feeling like a dying man. Now the others came to see him, saying he had taken to

The *Facetiae* of Poggio

his bed none too soon. Shortly there came another member of the conspiracy. He professed to be a doctor, took his pulse, and declared that death was imminent.

Then the others began saying, one to another: "He is dying. His feet are getting cold. His tongue is stammering. His eyes are clouded." And finally: "He is dead." And another added: "Let us push closed his eyes and arrange his hands and carry him out to be buried. Oh, what a great loss! He was a good fellow and a true friend." They consoled each other.

Nigniaccia, corpse-like, said not a word and believed he was dead. He was put into a coffin and carried through the city by the young men, who, in answer to all questionings, said that Nigniaccia was dead and they were taking him to be buried. On the way many people got in on the joke and joined the procession and they too kept saying that Nigniaccia was dead and they were taking him to be buried. They passed an inn-keeper and when he learned who it was, he shouted: "He was a nasty beast, and a thief! He deserved to be hanged."

Nigniaccia, hearing those words, stuck up his head and said: "If I were alive and not dead, I would tell you, you cut-throat, that you lie in your teeth." The pall bearers roared with laughter and they set the coffin down and they departed, leaving him there in it. [No. 268.]

¶ *The next combines Renaissance irreverence and Poggio's favorite theme of adultery.*



HE common people of Geta make their living chiefly from the sea. A sailor among them, a very poor man, left his young wife and poorly furnished house and went to sea, wandering here and there to earn some money.

After five years he returned and immediately as he landed he rushed home to see his wife who in the meantime, not expecting him to return, had taken up with another man. As the sailor entered his house, he noticed that a large part of it had been renovated, beautified and enlarged. He wondered at this and asked his wife how it had come about that what was formerly an ugly shack had become so beautiful.

His wife replied that it was by the grace of God, who gives assistance to all. "God be blessed," said the sailor, "for the great kindness He has bestowed upon us." Then he sees the bedroom, a very beautiful bed and other pieces of furniture far above his wife's financial abilities and again he asked where they had come from. Again his wife replied that it had come through the grace of God. Once again he returned thanks to God for his great bounty.

The *Facetiae* of Poggio

Other things meet his eyes that are strange and unexpected in his house; they are also the gift of God. The man is beginning to wonder at the favors which God has lavished upon him, when a pretty little boy, about three years old, appears and in childlike manner begins to caress his mother. The husband, seeing the boy, asked who that fellow was. His wife said he was hers. In some surprise her husband asked how he could have come to have a child when he was away. His wife replied that he too was by the grace of God. The man became indignant at the superabundance of the divine grace, which had gone to the length of procreating children for him and he said: "I certainly owe God a lot of thanks for paying so much attention to my interests."

But it did seem to him that God had been a little too considerate, in even being thoughtful enough to provide him with children in his absence. [No. I.]

☪ *The following story actually goes back to the Fifth Century, B.C., in Athens, and the opening scene of Aristophanes' The Frogs, which is pretty close to as far back as one can hope to trace (with assurance) any facetia or joe-miller.*



ANOTHER rather ignorant fellow, Piero by name, had ploughed his fields until noon. About to make his way back to town, he tied his plough on the back of the donkey and then he himself mounted, after sending the oxen ahead of them. His oxen were tired and he himself completely worn out. As the donkey began to falter under his too heavy burden, Piero became aware that the animal could hardly move. So he got off, put the plough on his own shoulders and mounted the donkey again. "Now you can go all right," he said, "for I am carrying the plough; not you." [No. 56.]

☪ *The next, from the fabliaux to Boccaccio to Poggio, became a favorite type in Renaissance jest books: how the wife outwitted her husband and lay with her lover.*



MY fellow townsman, Peter, once related to me a humorous story which illustrates the cleverness of women. He was having an affair with the wife of a rather stupid peasant who spent most of his nights in the fields to avoid his creditors. One evening, when my friend had entered into the woman's company, her husband unexpectedly came home. The wife quickly hid her lover under the bed and turning to her husband, attacked him severely for returning, asserting that he was willing to spend the rest of his days in prison.

"The police officers have just searched the whole house for you, to take you to jail," she said. "When I told them that you slept out-of-doors, they

The *Facetiæ* of Poggio

left, but they said they would soon return." Frightened, the husband asked how he could escape them; for the gates of the city were already closed.

His wife said: "What will you do, poor fellow! If you are caught, it's all over with you!" So he kept asking his wife's advice, trembling; and she, skilled at trickery, said: "Go up into the dove-cote, spend this night there, I shall lock the door outside of it and remove the ladder, so that no one will suspect you are there."

He obeys his wife's words. She locked the door, so that her husband could not get out and called out her lover from his hiding place. He got up and acting as though he were a troop of police officers who had returned, filled the house with shouts, while the woman loudly defended her husband, who was trembling with fear in his hiding place. Then the tumult died down, and the two lovers went to the bed and gave the night to Venus; while her husband lurked among the doves and their droppings. [No. 10.]

¶ *When a husband tries to outwit his wife it winds up disastrously.*



THE following tale is well known in Mantua. Near the bridge of the city is a mill that belongs to a man named Cornicolo. After dinner, one summer's day, the miller was sitting on the bridge and he saw a young well-built peasant girl acting as though she were lost.

It was late, the sun was setting and he urged her to go to his wife. She agreed. So he called over one of his servants and told him to take the girl to his wife, see that she was fed and show her to a particular room where she should sleep. His wife dismissed the servant and suspecting that her husband was up to something, gave the girl her own bed and went herself to the bedroom that had been made up for the girl.

The miller purposely stayed out very late and when he thought his wife would be sound asleep, went to the bedroom that he thought was the girl's room and silently lay with his wife, who too remained silent. He then left the room, related his exploits to his servant and urged him to follow suit. So the servant went in and lay with his master's wife. In the meantime, Cornicolo had gone to his own room and slipped carefully into his bed, lest he should awaken his wife, who he thought was sleeping by his side. Very early the next morning he got up and quietly went outdoors, thinking all the while that he had had the girl.

Finally he came home to have breakfast. His wife brought to him five fresh eggs to eat. He wondered at this, and asked her what was the story. Smiling she said: "I am giving you one egg for each course which you ran

The *Facetiae* of Poggio

last night.” He caught on that he had fallen into his own trap, let her believe she had been embraced those five times by him, and ate the eggs.

It frequently happens that the wicked are caught in their own toils. [No. 270.]

☞ *A favorite Poggio theme was the ignorance of the clergy. Not only did they not know Cicero, as any cultured humanist did, but (he implies) they did not know about their own religion.*



PRIEST was expounding to his congregation on the passage in the Gospels where it says that Jesus fed five thousand people out of five loaves of bread; but erroneously, he said five hundred people, not five thousand. His clerk in a low whisper told him he was mistaken in the number, that the Bible said five thousand. “Hush, you fool,” said the priest. “They will hardly believe the number I said.” [No. 227.]

☞ *The next again kids the clergy.*



T Tivoli a friar who was not very careful with his language was preaching to his congregation and he was thundering forth against adultery. “It is such a grave sin,” he said, “that I would prefer to know ten virgins than one married woman.” Many present would have preferred the same. [No. 44.]

☞ *I’m not sure whether that clergyman qualifies as ignorant, or not. People who like to brag get their reward in the next.*



MAN whose health wasn’t the best and whose wealth wasn’t the greatest was taking a wife. One day in summer, he was invited to dinner by his fiancée’s parents. He took along a friend and he gave him instructions to magnify whatever he heard him say.

His future mother-in-law complimented him on the fine suit he was wearing. He said that he had another much more beautiful. His friend added that he had a third, also, that cost twice as much as the second. The future father-in-law then inquired about his holdings in property. The man said that he had an estate outside of town which provided a comfortable living. His friend added: “Have you forgotten that other estate, much more elegant and the very great profit it brings in?”

Whatever the man boasted of, his friend raised the bid for him. Noticing that his prospective son-in-law was eating very little, his host plied him

The *Facetiae* of Poggio

with food. His guest replied: "I am usually not very well in the summer." To which his friend added: "Oh, it's much more than that. He is in bad health in the summer, but he's in much poorer health in the winter."

There was a good laugh all around. The vain fool had wanted himself praised beyond the truth and he reaped the reward of his folly. [No. 177.]

☉ *The following very amusing episode probably did take place.*



O Pope Urban v, at Avignon, the people of Perugia had sent an embassy of three men. On their arrival the Pope happened to be gravely ill, but not to keep them waiting, he gave them an audience, first begging them to speak very briefly. One of them, a learned man, had memorized en route a very long oration to deliver to the Pope. Paying no attention to the Pope's infirmity or that the Pope was lying in bed, he proceeded to orate at great length and from time to time the Pope showed clear signs of his weariness.

When this fool had finished his long peroration, Pope Urban, with his usual courtesy, asked the other two if they had anything to add. One of them, who had perceived the stupidity of the previous speaker and the boredom of the Pope, spoke up:

"Most Holy Father, we have express orders that, if you do not immediately grant our request, we are not to leave before my colleague here repeats to you his entire speech." The Pope laughed at this clever jest and ordered that the request of the Perugians be granted immediately. [No. 125.]

☉ *One last, one of the shortest sermons on record.*



U N one of our mountain towns a great throng of people from different parts of the country had gathered. They had come to celebrate the festival of Saint Stephen. The usual sermon was to be preached to the people by a friar. It was late, his fellow-clergymen were hungry and they dreaded the prospect of another of his long drawn-out sermons. So one after another of them whispered in his ear urging that he be brief, as he made his way to the pulpit.

He readily allowed himself to be persuaded and after a few customary introductory words, he said: "My brethren, last year from this same pulpit and to this same congregation, I spoke of our Saint, his life and his miracles. I omitted nothing of what I had been told, nothing of what I had read in Sacred Writings about him. I know you all remember what I told you. Since that time I have not heard that he has done anything new. So cross yourselves and say a prayer." And he turned away, and left. [No. 38.]

The *Facetiæ* of Poggio

That was Poggio Bracciolini.

Strangely enough, after his death, a very odd thing happened to him, funny enough to have been included in his *Facetiæ* and in many ways similar to a posthumous anecdote frequently told of the Hojah. Poggio was clearly, if not irreligious, at least irreverent of the established religion. In spite of being Papal Secretary he resisted all his life the offers and temptations of taking holy orders in the church, clearly preferring pagan humanism.

After his death, the Florentines were so proud that they erected a statue to him, the work of Donatello, and (a thing which he might have resisted) set it up in the facade of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. In 1560 the cathedral required alterations and his statue had to be moved. By some accident it wound up (where it now stands) in another part of the church, among the Twelve Apostles!

Strange company for the author of the heavily untranslatable *Facetiæ*.

ALBERT RAPP

Supplementary

NOTES



OGGIO BRACCIOLINI, or Poggio—Bracciolini? In other words do you index him under “B” or “P”? The Harvard Library, the British Museum, and the *Enciclopedia Italiana* index him under “B.” The Library of Congress and the Bibliothèque Nationale index him under “P.” That’s about as thorough a split as you can expect.

The answer seems to be that his father’s name was Bracciolini, but that he was given his grandfather’s name, Poggio. This was a period of transition from the medieval system of a single name (Isadore, Alcuin, Leonardo) to the classical multipartite nomenclature. This transition has caused the confusion.

☪ *How did these stories originate? We have some interesting internal evidence. Story No. 238 goes as follows:*



WHEN I was in England, a very amusing thing happened to a fuller and it should not be omitted from these tales. He was married and he had in his house-hold many young male and female servants. He set his eyes on one of the latter, a rather pretty and charming girl.

After he had kept after her a great deal, she finally told his wife. The wife told her to agree to a rendezvous with him. On the day and time agreed upon and in a secret and dark meeting-place, the wife substituted herself for the servant-girl. The man appeared, lay with the woman, not knowing it was his wife. Then the man left, he told what he had enjoyed to one of the young men, and suggested that he too go and lie with the servant-girl (as he thought).

So the young man did and the wife thought it was her husband again and said nothing. Soon came another young man, also sent by her husband, and she thought it was her husband again and she endured a third assault. She kept thinking it was her husband and each of them thought she was the maid.

Finally, she left the place unobserved and that night rebuked her husband roundly for being so negligent of her, and so amorous toward a maid-

Supplementary Notes

servant that he wound up lying with his wife (thinking it was the maid) three times in one short space of time. The husband kept to himself his error and his wife's lapse, which he himself had brought about.

Now this story is a clear doublet of No. 270, of the five fresh eggs. But No. 270 is set in a specific Italian town, given a specific Italian hero (?) and is a distinct improvement in story writing and in humor over its predecessor. Here we can see that Poggio picked up this story, probably when he actually visited England, brought it back, told and retold it, improved it, and then gave it a characteristic Italian setting and finally published it in his *Facetiae*.

Whether in his many travels or in his broad readings, this was probably the process. Of this process we are given a further intimate view in the very brief "Conclusio," attached at the end of the "*Facetiae*."

Here Poggio states that he and the other papal secretaries gathered daily in a secluded room of the Papal Palace, discussed the news of the day and swapped stories. In these stories, he adds, no one was spared and even the Pope was often kidded. Poggio lists the names of some of the *fabulatores*, "story tellers," whose *facetiae* were included. Can we believe that the actual persons kidded in the stories took part in the episodes?

Unless there is other strong evidence the answer is "no;" or, at least, "not necessarily." Poggio gives us this answer, probably unintentionally, when he says that the papal secretaries had nicknamed their secluded meeting room "*Bugiale*," an Italian word which is possibly best rendered "Liar's Haven."

It is noteworthy that Poggio never anywhere admits to any literary sources for his *facetiae*. This is in spite of the fact that I have found at least ten with prototypes in the French *fabliaux*, at least ten more going back to Hojah Nasreddin stories and a sprinkling traceable to other early sources.

This silence may not have come from a desire to conceal. He may have acquired these stories orally. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of the tales are originals; not necessarily Poggio originals, nor those of his *confabulatores*, but originals of some anonymous jokewright, created and circulated anonymously, as such stories are today.

Poggio was personally irate at the lewdness and ignorance of the clergy. So he was particularly happy to collect, or to make up, stories on these themes. The moron stories come, in my estimation, as I said, from the Hojah Nasreddin cycle. They may have arrived orally with traders from Anatolia through Venice to Florence. They may even have arrived with the

Supplementary Notes

learned Byzantine Greeks, who fled Constantinople before its fall and brought the brightest torch of the New Learning to the city of Florence. There is clear evidence of exchange between the Greeks and the Turks in the Hojah stories.

The other most popular theme in the *facetiae*, the woman outsmarting her husband and lying with her lover, seems to have arrived to Poggio from the *fabliaux*, short stories in rhyme, most of them 13th century, recited by *jongleurs* after dinner. I assume there was an assist by Boccaccio.

This theme, for some reason the delight of the Renaissance, seems to have invaded Europe in an interesting round-about way, through one of the most significant names in jokelore, the very little known Spanish Jew, Petrus Alphonsus. This person deserves a fuller account.

Petrus Alphonsus (or Alphonsus Petrus)—it isn't certain, and doesn't too much matter—it wasn't his real name, was born in Huesca, Spain, in 1062. He became a rabbi and for that day, a brilliant physician, much admired by Alphonse, King of Castille and Leon. At the age of forty-four on the Feast Day of St. Peter, he turned Roman Catholic and took the two names, Peter's and Alphonse's. The King became his patron.

Petrus Alphonsus' significance in jokelore is that, shortly after 1110 he translated from Arabic into Latin, the earliest collection of oriental tales known to the West, a work entitled the *Disciplina Clericalis*. These won immediate popularity. Translations of the whole, or in part, are known to have been made into Spanish, French, Italian, German, English and even Icelandic!

These tales, 30 all told (in some versions 34) are not told to be funny. They are, as the title indicates, anecdotes for the clergy to use in their sermons. But very significant is the fact that four of the stories embody the theme of the wife deceiving her husband and lying with her lover. This popular Renaissance theme can therefore be traced back through Arab-Christian-Jewish Spain to the Orient; on the face of it a very unlikely source, when one considers the status of married women in the Arab world.

Of further interest is that three of Petrus Alphonsus' stories are animal fables (Aesop) and several others anecdotes and quotations from Plato, Aristotle, and others of the Greeks. This again emphasizes the role of the Moslems in absorbing Greek culture and then funneling it back to the Western World via Venice or Spain.

But the *Facetiae* are basically a Renaissance phenomenon, which means directly sparked from pagan Rome and Greece.

A. R.

Supplementary

POGGIANA



☪ *Additional selections from The Facetiæ, or Jocose Tales of Poggio, published by Isidore Liseux, 1879 (Paris). (SCOWAH)*

REPLY OF THE ROMAN PRIEST LORENZO



HE day when the Roman Angelotto was made a Cardinal by Pope Eugene, a jocular priest, named Lorenzo, went home cheering merrily, and overflowing with mirth and joy. His neighbours asked him what good fortune had befallen him, that he should be so cheerful and so jolly:—"It is all right with me now," said he, "and I may indeed feel sanguine, when I see fools and lunatics made Cardinals of; Angelotto being still more crazed than I am, I also shall soon be a Cardinal." [No. 29.]

STORY OF MANCINI





MANCINI, a rustic of my village, carried corn to Figlino, on asses which he frequently hired for the journey. Once, on his way home from market, he felt fatigued and mounted the best donkey of the lot. When getting near his cottage, he counted the asses that were in front of him, but took no account of the animal he was on, so that he fancied one was missing. Full of anxiety, he leaves the asses with his wife, charging her to take them back to their owners, and forthwith returns to the market-town, seven miles distant, still riding the same beast, and enquiring of all those he meets on the way, if they have not found a stray donkey. Always answered in the negative, he comes home at night, sad and grieving at the loss of the donkey. At last, at the call of his wife, he alights, and finds that he has before his eyes the animal he has taken so much trouble to look for. [No. 55.]

☪ *This jest parallels one from Nasreddin.*


Supplementary Poggiana

A MAN WHO WAS SEARCHING FOR HIS WIFE DROWNED IN THE RIVER.

NOTHER man, whose wife had been drowned in a river, was ascending the stream to search for her. A looker-on, much surprised, told him he ought to prosecute his search in the direction that the river flowed:—"I should never find her that way," he replied. "For, during her life-time, she was so cross-gained, so crabbed, so provoking, that, even after death, she could never have gone but against the stream." [No. 60.]

 *This jest appears in many 16th and 17th century English jest books.*

FUNNY STORY OF AN OLD MAN WHO CARRIED HIS DONKEY.

T was being said, in a conversation between the Pope's Secretaries, that to regulate one's self by the opinions of the vulgar was to submit to the most miserable bondage, since it is impossible to please every one, some thinking one way, some the other, and approving of what their neighbours blamed. In proof of which, one of the assistants related the following story, which he had seen illustrated in Germany, both by pen and pencil.


"An old man," said he, "had set out for the market with his son, in order to sell his donkey which led the way, without any burden on its back. As they passed some husbandmen who were working in the fields, these reproached the old man for leaving the donkey without any load, instead of one of them riding it, when both would have found it most desirable, the father from his old age, the son from his tender years. The old man seated his son on the donkey, and kept on his way on foot. Others seeing them, chid the father for his folly in putting on the donkey's back a lad stronger than himself, whilst he, stricken with years, trudged behind. So, he changed his mind, put down the youth, and took his seat. But he had not proceeded far, when he heard a third party upbraiding him for dragging his boy after him like a lackey, without regard for his youth, and he, the father, riding quietly. Moved by the taunt, he took up his son with him on the donkey's back. Matters thus settled, he was pursuing his road, when he was met by other people who inquired whether the animal was his; and, having answered in the affirmative, he was rated for taking no more care of it than if it had been a stranger's; the poor beast, said they, was not fit for such a load; one person was as much as it could carry. The man was distracted by so many inconsistent remarks; whether it had no rider, had one, or had two, he got blamed at every step; at last, he tied the donkey's feet, hung it

Supplementary Poggiana

upon a staff, one end of which he put on his son's shoulder and the other on his own, and thus began to carry the animal to market. Every one burst out laughing at the novel sight, and made fun of the couple's stupidity, especially the father's. Enraged at their banter, the old man, who stood by the side of a river, pitched his ass, with its legs tied, into the stream, and went home, minus his beast. Thus, the poor fellow, for having tried to please every one, satisfied nobody, and lost his donkey into the bargain." [No. 100.]


☛ *This jest appears in numerous 16th and 17th century jest books.*

A BARRISTER WHO HAD RECEIVED OF A LITIGANT A FIG AND A PEACH.


 WE were blaming the ingratitude of people who, quick at making others labour for them, are remiss in requiting their services. Antonio Lusco, a man of wit and shrewdness, spoke as follows: "Vincenzo, a friend of mine, was counsel to a very rich but stingy man, for whom he had argued numerous lawsuits, without ever being able to get his fees.

Being engaged by him in a very difficult case, he attended the court on the day appointed, having, that same morning, received from his client a fig and a peach. It was in vain that his adversaries heaped up arguments against him; he kept silent; they challenged him repeatedly, but he never said one word in reply. Every body was amazed, especially his client, who enquired the meaning of his silence:—"The fig and the peach you sent me," he replied, "have so frozen my lips, that I could not utter a syllable." " [No. 108.]

A MAN WHO WANTED TO SPEND ONE THOUSAND FLORINS TO MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN, AND THE REPLY HE GOT.

 COUNTRYMAN of ours, a young Florentine with scanty brains, was telling a friend that he meant to spend one thousand florins to rove about the world and make himself known:—"Better," replied his interlocutor, who knew him thoroughly, "better spend two thousand, that you may not be known." [No. 120.]


AN INDISCREET QUESTION BY A PRIEST.

 UTSIDE of the gate of Perugia stands the church of Saint-Mark, where Cicero, the Vicar, on the occasion of a solemn festival which had attracted all the parishioners, was preaching the customary sermon. "Dear Brethren," said he by way


Supplementary Poggiana

of conclusion, "I wish you would put an end to a great perplexity of mine. During Lent, I have heard the confessions of your wives who, one and all, averred that they had kept inviolate the faith they owe their husbands; you, on the contrary, have almost all acknowledged having had intercourse with other men's wives. In order that I should no longer be disquieted by that state of doubt, I want to know of you who and where are the women you thus sinned with." [No. 123.]


A WOMAN WHO, WISHING TO HIDE HER HEAD, EXHIBITED HER BOTTOM.

 WOMAN who, in consequence of a disease of the skin, had had her hair shaved off, being called by a neighbour on some pressing business, went out precipitately, and forgot to cover up her head. On seeing her in that state, the neighbour rated her for showing herself in public with such a bald and uncomely pate. She then, in order to hide her head, pulled up her petticoats from behind, and wishing to conceal her baldness, disclosed her backside. People had a good laugh at the expense of the poor woman, who, in her anxiety to avoid a small breach of decorum, was guilty of such gross impropriety.—The foregoing applies to those who endeavour to conceal a slight delinquency by committing a more grievous offence. [No. 137.]

A FUNNY ANSWER WHICH APPLIES TO MANY BISHOPS.

 OISIO MARSILIO was asked by a friend what was the meaning of the tassels on Bishops' mitres, and replied that the one signified the New, and the other the Old Testament, which Bishops should always have by heart. The querist proceeded to ask the signification of the two bandlets which hang down from the mitre to the loins:—"They mean that Bishops are ignorant of both," answered Marsilio. A funny, but correct answer, as regards many Prelates. [No. 186.]


JOKE OF A PHYSICIAN, WHO USED TO PRESCRIBE MEDICINES BY LOT.

 T is the custom in Rome to send to the Physician some of the patient's urine, with one or two silver coins, in order to have a consultation. A certain medical man, of my acquaintance, used to write down, at night, on slips of paper, which they call prescriptions, various remedies for sundry diseases, and throw


Supplementary Poggiana

them pell-mell into a bag. In the morning when the urines were brought him, and he was asked to prescribe, he thrust his hand into the bag, and extracted the first paper which happened to come between his fingers, saying in Italian to his client: "Prega Dio te la mandi buona," which means: "Pray to God that you may draw a good one." A sorry condition for those poor people, whose recovery was dependent upon chance, not upon reason. [No. 203.]


A FLORENTINE WHO WAS A GREAT LIAR.

 HERE lived in Florence a man so addicted to lying, that never a word of truth escaped his lips. A friend of his, whom he had repeatedly deceived, met him one day, and as he was about to speak: "You lie," said he.—"How could I," retorted the other, "since I have not yet said anything?"—"I mean," replied his friend, "that you will lie as soon as you speak." [No. 224.]

HOW WAS PUT TO CONFUSION A BAWLING PREACHER.

 FRIAR, who frequently preached, was given to screaming, as is the wont of fools, and a woman of the congregation wept at the sound of his fierce exclamations. Having frequently noticed her, the Friar was convinced that she was moved to tears by his eloquent appeals to the love of God and to the awakening of the conscience; so he called her aside, inquired the motive of her groans, and asked her if his words worked upon her mind and called forth what he took for pious tears. The woman replied that she was painfully disturbed and aggrieved by his shrieks and screams. "I am a widow," said she, "and my departed husband had left me an ass which helped me to get my living; the poor beast used, night and day, to bray just like you; now it has died, and I remain forlorn and destitute. So, when I hear you preach so loud, your voice reminds me of my poor ass, and I am fain to cry, whether I will or no." Thus was put to confusion the foolish man, who might more correctly have been styled a barker than a preacher. [No. 230.]

A GOOD JOKE OF AN IGNORANT MAN WHO PUT DOCTORS OUT OF COUNTENANCE.

 EVERAL clerks were discoursing on the age and labours of Our Saviour, and his having begun to preach when he was past thirty. An illiterate man, who was with them, asked which was the first thing of all which Jesus had done, as soon as he

Supplementary Poggiana

had reached the end of his thirtieth year. Some of the Clerks were staggered, some gave various opinions: "With all your learning," quoth the man, "you are ignorant of a fact which is easily ascertained." "Well, what was it he did first?" enquired the Clerks.—"Why, he began by entering upon his thirty-first year," was the reply. Everybody laughed, and the sally was found witty. [No. 245.]

CLEVER SAYING OF A MAN WHO PROMISED TO TEACH A DONKEY.



CERTAIN Lord, anxious to confiscate the property of one of his vassals, who boasted of his varied abilities, ordered him, under a heavy penalty, to teach a donkey to read. The man declared the thing to be impossible unless a long delay were allowed him for the instruction of the animal, and, being told to state the time he wanted, required ten years. Every one laughed at him for having undertaken an impossibility. He comforted his friends, however, saying: "I have nothing to fear; for, between this and then, either I shall be dead, or the ass, or the Lord." Thus showing the wisdom of protracting and deferring a difficulty. [No. 250.]

☪ *This is a Nasreddin jest. In the Nasreddin version there is added the thought that perhaps at the end of ten years the ass could talk.*

AN ARBITRATOR IN WHOSE HOUSE A PIG SPILLED SOME OIL.



A MAN who had been appointed arbitrator between two litigants, received a jug of oil of one of the parties who, by that means, hoped to secure a sentence in his behalf; the fact came to the ears of the other party, who hastened to send a fat pig, requesting favour in his own interest. The arbitrator pronounced himself for the pig. He who had given the oil came to him, and complained of the result, reminding him of the present and of the promise made:—"Well," said the arbitrator, "a certain pig entered my house, and finding your oil in the way, broke the jug and spilled the contents on the floor, so that I forgot you." A most appropriate reply in the mouth of a venal judge. [No. 256.]

☪ *The same story appeared in slightly different form in Tale No. 22 of the Hundred Merrie Tales, published in 1526. This is the form in which it appeared in the Hundred Merrie Tales.*

Supplementary Poggiana

☉ *In Tale No. 22 we learn of the corrupt man of law.*



HERE was a man of law which, on a time, should be judge between a poor man and a rich. The poor man came and gave him a glass of oil (which was as much as his power could stretch to) and desired that he (the judge) would be good in his matter. "Yes," quod he, "the matter shall pass (go easily) with thee." The rich man perceiving that, sent to the same judge a fat hog and prayed him to be favorable on his side. Wherefore, he gave judgment against the poor man. When the poor man saw that he was condemned, piteously complaining, he said to the judge, "Sir, I gave you a glass of oil and ye promised by your Faith the matter should pass with me." To whom the judge said, "For a truth there came a hog into my home which found the glass of oil and overthrew and break it, and so through the spilling of the oil I clean forgot thee."

☉ *The moral added to this tale was, "Whereby ye may see, that every man amonge the rich bath his will, the poore taketh wronge."*

☉ *Poggio's facetia No. 67 falls into the moronic category. Poggio wrote:*



HE father of a friend of mine was having an affair with a woman whose husband was a fool and who stuttered. One night the lover went to her home and believing her husband was away, knocked loudly at the door and mimicking the husband's stuttering voice, asked her to open the door. The fool husband, who happened to be at home, hearing his simulated voice, said to his wife "Giovanna open the door and let him in—for it does seem to be me."

☉ *A parallel jest appears in an ancient undated Thesaurus of Chinese Jestes (Hsiao Lin Kuang Cbi. Four Fascicules. SCOWAH) in which the following incident is recorded.*



WIFE expected her husband to be absent from home for a number of days. She was entertaining her lover, when suddenly she heard the unmistakable sound of her husband's footsteps approaching her living quarters. There was only one escape and this through the window. The living quarters being some distance from the street level, the lover hesitated long enough to permit the husband's entry in the room, who rushed to the lover as he was leaping out of the window. The husband reached the window in time to grasp the feet of the lover, from which he removed the shoes. The husband started berating his wife for her faithlessness and warned her that in the morning

Supplementary Poggiana

he would seek out a shoeless man in the village and kill him. The husband, in his rage, became intoxicated and retired in an inebriated condition, but before retiring he placed under his pillow the shoes of the lover. During the night the wife substituted her husband's shoes for those of her lover, and in the morning when the husband awakened he looked under his pillow and, to his surprise, found his own shoes. He then turned to his wife and apologized, saying: "Forgive me for berating you last night. I now realize that it was I who jumped out of the window."

N.S.

The Facetiæ of Poggio

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THE following bibliography sets forth the publications of the *Facetiæ* of Poggio reproduced either in whole or in part. The original publication consisted of 273 jests. In the numerous publications hereinafter noted, various numbers of these jocose tales appeared.

Wherever there is an item identified which is in any of the libraries noted, the following symbols will refer to the following libraries:

BM, British Museum
BNP, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
BNCF, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze
H, Harvard Library
HUN.L, Huntington Library
LC, Library of Congress
SCOWAH, San Francisco Public Library

The widespread reprinting of some of Poggio's jests in Italy, France, Holland, Germany, England, Spain, Poland, and elsewhere, was often anonymous or without credit to Poggio and on occasions were credited to others who either plagiarized Poggio's jests or extracted them from the same public domain of *facetiæ* in which Poggio found them.

The following bibliography is far from definitive. An effort was made (without success) to obtain the bibliographies of Poggio's *facetiæ* from several additional well-known libraries. For many significant references we are indebted to Alfred Semerau's *Die Schwänke und Schnürren des Florentiners*—Gian-Francesco Poggio, 1905, and to Dr. Fritz Harkort of the editorial staff of *Encyclopädie des Märchens* in Gottingen, Germany.

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* In a recent publication (*Poggio Bracciolini*, 1959) the author declares, without disclosing his sources of information, that the *Facetiae* were published serially, the first portion in June, 1440, the second in July, 1444, and the third in January, 1447.

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*N. S. X. M. P.
confronts the Pasquino statue in Rome*

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